

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

June 2006

CONTROL CAMPAIGN

The latest on the FBU's response to regionalisation

MODERN TIMES

New shifts meet resistance



ULF ... it's as easy as 123

FBU secures more money to boost members' careers



Clone Town Britain

Why Tesco-isation is bad for your health



Welsh Fire Minister

Edwina Hart on partnership with the FBU and risk reduction planning



FBU members fighting cuts deserve the support of all of us



You will have seen recently the results of the ballot for strike action in Hertfordshire.

85.4% of our members voted to take strike action on a very high turnout of over 70%.

Politicians can only dream of mandates on such a scale but our members in Hertfordshire have demonstrated very clearly that there is anger at the cuts proposals and a determination to resist those attacks.

Our members in Hertfordshire are to be congratulated on this result and our local officials also deserve praise. To build a campaign takes many things – above all it takes hard work and that is clearly demonstrated in the voting figures.

What has also been demonstrated is a great sense of unity between wholtime members and those working the retained duty system. This is to be applauded and I am sure that our membership in Hertfordshire will go from strength to strength on the basis of this campaign.

I warned in last month's magazine that fire service politicians ignore the views of our members at their peril. Sadly that warning has been ignored and the consequences are as I predicted. Other local fire services face similar disputes as a result of the cuts agenda or because local consultation and negotiation procedures are not functioning.

I have said many times that FBU members do not want

to strike. We all understand the seriousness of such a step for workers in an emergency service. But equally, our members are not willing to be pushed around and ignored while the fire service is cut back. Closing fire stations and cutting firefighters jobs are nothing to do with 'modernisation' – they are just old fashioned cuts.

As we go to press it appears that strike action is inevitable. Our officials locally have done everything they can to try to avert this but so far little progress has been made. I urge all members to give full support to our members in Hertfordshire – attend their picket lines, support lobbies and demonstrations that are called. Please support the Hardship Fund. Their fight is for all of us.

Unions against privatisation

The fire service has not been exempt from the drive to privatise our public services. This drive leads to a worsening of service standards for the public and a worsening of conditions for the workers who deliver services.

A number of unions have come together recently to launch a campaign opposing this creeping privatisation. At a launch at the House of Commons I was pleased to speak alongside the General Secretaries of eleven other affected unions. We intend to take this campaign out to the public as well as into the corridors of Westminster. The campaign slogan of "Public Services not Private Profit" reflects the ethos of those who work in the public services



Families and trade unionists demonstrate for rail safety and against privatisation in London

including our own. I hope that FBU members will play a prominent role in building for the next event, a lobby of Parliament on 27 June.

Beyond satire...

In recent months I have attended meetings across the UK on the issues of pensions and the threat of regionalisation. In discussing with members locally I often

hear anger at the latest daft idea emanating from certain quarters of the fire service. The latest of these is scarcely believable.

A certain well-known northern fire brigade (well it's Merseyside actually) has introduced a scheme whereby employees who do not go sick are entered for a prize draw. The recent winner of this competition (with a car as prize)



is the manager in charge of sickness and attendance levels.

Instead of introducing gimmicks like this, fire authorities should be addressing the real issues of occupational health. They should be attempting to improve health and safety in the service rather than penalising those who are sick and injured. We now have firefighters in the appalling

position of being placed on half pay or zero pay. Stunts like this competition will do nothing to address real problems and will simply exacerbate bad feeling within the service.

Someone once said, in a different context, that we had reached the stage where satire was redundant. It appears the UK fire service is also reaching that stage. **Matt Wrack**

This month



16

Meet Wales Fire Minister Edwina Hart

Regulars

4 NEWS

Buncefield investigation, cuts fightback and a new fire minister

7 NEWS SPECIAL

Union launches alternative vision for the future of controls in regions

8 AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Britain does not have to become a nation of clone towns

16 WHAT DOES ... DO?

Firefighter talks to Wales fire minister Edwina Hart

18 HEALTH

Why asthma is a growing concern

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

What can I do if an airline lets me down?

20 DAY OFF

Teamwork, encouragement and bringing out the best in people – all in a day off for Karen Adams

22 PUZZLES

Win an illustrated book in the prize quiz

23 STATION CAT

Brings you news they don't want you to hear

Features

10 MODERN TIMES

Opposition is growing as changes to shift systems create instability

12 UNION LEARNING FUND

Union wins £1 million to help members enhance their lifelong learning

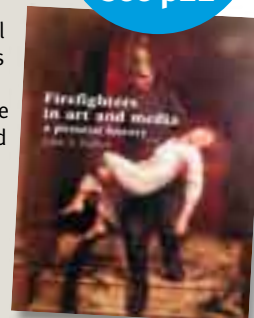
14 WIDENING HORIZONS

How Staffordshire members and officials are helping local communities abroad

PUZZLES

Take part in our prize quiz and win *Firefighters in art and media*, a history of visual representations of firefighters from 1600 to the present day and contains over 200 images. "A timely reminder of the calm bravery and ordinary humanity of the men and women of the fire service."

WIN
THIS
BOOK
see p22



COVER ILLUSTRATION:
MICK BROWNFIELD

Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE.
www.fbu.org.uk Tel: 020 8541 1765. Fax: 020 8546 5187
Design by Edition Periodicals 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ. www.edition.co.uk.
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH 16 5SN.



News

JUNE 2006

→ Latest news

→ Sounding off

→ In brief



Buncefield blamed on faulty fuel gauge

Vapour cloud visible for 23 minutes
on CCTV but went undetected

HSE INVESTIGATION

An overflowing petrol storage tank is the “prime suspect” behind the massive explosion and fire at the Buncefield oil depot on 11 December last year, according to a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report. Taf Powell, head of the investigation team, confirmed the first explosion either destroyed or made unusable the entire on-site firefighting capability.

Tank 912 was being pumped full of unleaded petrol when safety systems apparently failed to alert the on-site control room to the problem. A fuel gauge showing the tank was two-thirds full was in fact stuck in that position from around 3am onwards. A secondary “automatic failsafe” system meant to stop the fuel being pumped into the tank once it was full also failed.

Somewhere in the region of 300 tonnes of unleaded petrol – over a 41-minute period – spilled over the top of the tank down the side creating a rich fuel vapour. This process created an “ice mist” which, although not combustible itself, created a “tracer” for the movement and location of the vapour.

The vapour cloud grew and spread rapidly off the site and was clearly visible for

Serious and very dangerous explosions were taking place for the first 25 minutes the Herts Fire and Rescue Service personnel were at or near the scene

23 minutes on the CCTV cameras transmitting to the Buncefield site control room. This also went undetected.

The precise point of ignition may have been a generator house in the car park of the HQ of Northgate Technology, sited within 150 metres of tank 912, rather than on the Buncefield site itself. Although the main explosion was at 06.01 it was followed by a number of smaller explosions “which probably all occurred within half an hour of the initial explosion”.

This suggests that serious and very dangerous explosions – one blew off the top of tank 910 and sent it several hundred metres – were taking place for the first 25 minutes the Herts Fire and Rescue Service personnel were at or near the scene. The HSE inquiry continues. No public inquiry has been announced.

North Yorks faces call to reverse jobs cull

CUTS FIGHTBACK

The FBU has called on North Yorkshire fire bosses to reverse their decision to cut jobs at Scarborough fire station following a blaze at the Grand Hotel. Eight frontline firefighting jobs – two firefighter posts off each of the four shifts at the North Marine Road station – were lost last year. The reorganisation meant that the station's turntable ladder is no longer immediately available for emergencies.

The turntable was called to a fire at the Grand Hotel on Friday evening and a crew responded immediately but only because there happened to be enough firefighters at the station. Scarborough MP Robert Goodwill says the incident proves there should be no more cuts to fire services.

Even though the turntable ladder was not used at the Grand, the FBU said the incident highlights the need for the ladder to be available immediately. It said any

delay to a call at one of the town's hotels could cost lives. Scarborough firefighter and FBU spokesperson Alistair Biggs said: "If the turntable ladder is delayed an extra ten minutes, the result may be a fatality." The turntable ladder has been used to rescue eight people in the last five years.

"We use a system of dual crewing now which means the turntable can turn straight out if there's enough of us at the station. However, if we are out on a call and the turntable is needed in an emergency, we have to drive back to the station to drop a driver off so they can take it on to the incident. The consequences of these serious cuts in services could prove life threatening both to the public and fire crews," said Mr Biggs.

Ian Watkins, chairman of the FBU in North Yorkshire, said: "Last year there were 40 whole-time firefighter posts lost. There are chronic shortages of firefighters right across the brigade area now which are causing us a great deal of concern."



150 guests and 40 staff were evacuated from Scarborough's Grand Hotel on 6 May after fire broke out on the sixth floor. Firefighters from Scarborough were on the scene within minutes and were joined by crews from Filey, Snainton and Sherburn. Crews were also on their way from Malton and Kirkbymoorside in case the fire spread from the sixth floor. It took 40 minutes to control the blaze.

Herts FBU recommends rejection of FA proposals

CUTS FIGHTBACK

As *Firefighter* went to press the FBU Hertfordshire Brigade Committee recommended rejection of proposals presented by the fire authority following two days of talks between management and the FBU.

An initial strike date

of Monday 15 May was cancelled to allow time for Herts fire crews to receive and consider the proposals put to the FBU negotiating team. FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark was present at the talks in his capacity as NJC joint secretary.

The second strike date of 20 May remained in place.

A ballot that closed May 2 produced an 8:1 vote in favour of strike action over plans to cut emergency response firefighter posts and close two fire stations.

Almost all of the cuts will fall in the highest risk area of the county and on the stations that were the first to respond to the Buncefield fire.

Sounding off!

STEWART BROWN

FBU Executive Council Member,
Gay and Lesbian

Beating the pandemic

Every day millions of workers all over the world face stigma and discrimination at work because they have been diagnosed as HIV positive. Many lose their jobs, and some have lost their homes, friends and families.

The International Labour Office estimates that over 40 million people are affected globally with HIV and Aids and some 20 million people have already died, with no continent spared the pandemic.

We rightly focus on the human and social cost of the pandemic, but there is also the hidden economic cost. Addressing the economic dimension, the ILO writes: "HIV/AIDS destroys human capital built up over many years and weakens the capacity of workers to produce goods and services for the economy."

HIV and AIDS recognises no barriers and now demands the attention of opinion formers and decision makers everywhere.

In Britain, there are currently 53,000 people living with HIV and AIDS, mostly of working age. They deserve and must get trade union support and protection.

In December 2004, the TUC, supported by the Bill Morris Testimonial Fund for HIV and AIDS, convened a conference. This brought together a variety of organisations working to combat the effects of HIV and AIDS, including union members and organisers. The clear consensus was for the formation of a broad coalition involving every worker in every workplace. We need to move from seeing HIV and AIDS not only as an issue for trade union policies but an issue for workplace practice.

This conference and the subsequent campaign of the TUC and affiliates would not have got off the ground without the contribution of the FBU which has been carrying out fantastic work on HIV/AIDs over the years. This was recently underpinned by a resolution supported by our annual conference. There is clearly more work to be done on raising awareness of the consequences of HIV/AIDS not only to individuals, but to entire countries.

The fight against HIV and AIDS must now mobilise each union in every country and all of their members. Why not raise the issue at your branch, brigade or region with a view to getting actively involved through the TUC?

➔ For more information:

Bandula Kothalawala, TUC: 020 7467 1257
bkothalawala@tuc.org.uk www.tuc.org.uk
Nicola Douglas, National Aids Trust:
020 7814 6767 nicola.douglas@nat.org.uk
www.nat.org.uk

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



John Prescott: no work but all the trapping of office

JANINA STRUK/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Jim Fitzpatrick: new job at trade and industry



Angela Smith: former spokesperson for fire and rescue service

Goodbye Prescott and Fitzpatrick. Hello Angela Smith

RESHUFFLE

A new Department for Communities and Local Government will succeed The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister following the recent Cabinet reshuffle.

This department will take over the responsibilities of the ODPM including fire. It will also have responsibility for

race, women, faith, community cohesion and equality.

The Secretary of State for the new department is Ruth Kelly, previously Secretary of State for Education and Skills. She takes on the roles previously undertaken by the Deputy Prime Minister and David Miliband who has become Secretary of State at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural

Affairs. Jim Fitzpatrick – the minister for the fire and rescue service – has also moved to a new post in the Department of Trade and Industry.

Angela Smith, formerly of the Northern Ireland Office has taken Jim Fitzpatrick's place and will take on the fire brief. She is MP for Basildon and East Thurrock and was first elected to parliament in 1997. She was previously spokesperson for Essex Fire and Rescue Service whilst a councillor for Essex County Council.

John Prescott loses his department but keeps the trappings of office – including the car, the salary, and the two grace and favour homes.

International work to be stepped up

PANA LUP/PA/EMPHICS



Japanese firefighters – seen here dealing with the aftermath of an earthquake – are, contrary to ILO conventions, unable to organise locally. They are also banned from striking.

EDUCATION

An action plan to step up the FBU's international work is being drawn up following a two-day FBU school in April in Wales.

Threats to the employment and union rights of firefighters across the globe from the privatisation of public services and how they could be challenged were among the issues at the school, which was run by TUC tutor and FBU South West regional official John Drake and Dan Blackburn, the Director of the International Centre for Trade Union Rights. Students concluded that the international work of the union was crucial both in providing solidarity to fellow workers abroad and in underpinning rights of UK workers.

The course also looked at the development and enforcement of global labour standards through the International Labour Organisation, as well as the role of individual trade unions in promoting economic development and human rights.

In brief

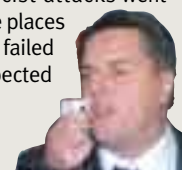
◆ KENT'S new fire chief has slammed the decision to abolish the brigade's control room and replace it with a "deeply controversial" regional centre covering nine counties. Charlie Hendry fears lives could be put at risk because of the loss of vital local knowledge. "My concerns are also with the fact I've got 40 very skilful, very dedicated and very good people that are now looking at redundancy, which I think is a shame," he said.

◆ A Merseyside firefighter suffered serious burns to his face during a rescue on May 14 of four people at a fire at a house turned into flats in the Kensington area of Liverpool.



◆ The 'Public Services Not Private Profit' campaign now enjoys the support of 15 trade unions including the FBU and over 70 MPs. FBU members and officials are encouraged to write to their MP to ask for their support for EDM 1940 'Public Services Not Private Profit'. A standard letter is available on the FBU website. Visit www.fbu.org.uk and follow the Lobby Your MP link. A rally and lobby of parliament will take place 27 June.

◆ The BNP gained 32 new councillors in the local elections on May 4, taking its total to 48 across the country. In the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, it won 11 seats. When the BNP previously held one seat in Barking, racist attacks went up by 18%. The places where the BNP failed to make its expected breakthrough were in places where there were strong anti-fascist campaigns.



BNP leader Nick Griffin

STEFANO CAGNONI/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

FBU's alternative vision kicks off in the South

Rolling launches will spread across all of the English regions hit by the Government's plans and come as the ODPM Select Committee report into the project is set to be published



The launches of the union's alternative to the Government's regional control rooms have kicked off in the south west and south east England. They are part of a programme that will be spread across all regions hit by the plans and come as the ODPM Select Committee report into the project is set to be published.

The FBU alternative contained in the *Regional Control: National Resilience* document, uses the existing network of local fire controls while designating a number of existing brigade controls as "resilience controls (ResCons)". One ResCon would be designated for each of the nine regions in England, plus one ResCon for Wales, one ResCon for Scotland and one ResCon for Northern Ireland.

ResCons throughout the UK would be connected to each other to provide a coordinated UK-wide response and resilience to major regional and national emergencies. Fire control centres within local brigades would carry out emergency mobilisations and manage response to incidents.

The proposals are a better, simpler and cheaper alternative to the Government's plans. They would be quicker to implement

and avoid the very high costs and risks of the Government's unpopular plans under which the south west would lose seven controls in Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset to be replaced by a regional control in Taunton, Somerset. The south east would lose eight controls in Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to be replaced by a regional control in Fareham, Hampshire.

Retain existing controls

The union's plans would retain existing controls in all brigades in the south west and would turn the control at Bath into a regional resilience control. The solution would improve possible responses to major emergencies such as terrorist attack while ensuring local 999 emergencies were handled effectively.

Tam McFarlane, FBU South West regional secretary, told local media: "The Government's plans are purely about dealing with a UK-wide incident that requires a co-ordinated response. The problem is the plans are solely in isolation for that incident, and don't take into account the needs of local

people. The Government's plans would lose the local side of the fire service. Under our ideas there would be a regional centre, but also seven control rooms would stay open to deal with everyday calls about fires, car crashes and flooding."

Paula Coppinger, South East England FBU Regional Control Staff Rep said at the south east launch: "Our solution builds on, and utilises, all our existing controls and is based on the knowledge and skills of professional staff at all levels."

365 days a year service

"ResCons will provide a true resilience and emergency response capability to Regional and National emergencies. At the same time preserving the critical national infrastructure of brigade controls which provide a 24 hour, 365 days a year service to deal with local emergencies."

Mark Simmons, South East England Regional Secretary said: "Fire service professionals have never been convinced that the case for regional controls has ever been made at any level. The Government's plans lack genuine resilience, are high risk, very expensive and potentially a significant drain on financial resources for years to come."

"Unfortunately it will be the local council tax payer left to carry a very large white elephant. We believe our alternative suits the needs of a modern fire and rescue service and urge the Government to rethink its plans and enter into mature debate over the alternative proposals."

The FBU revealed in *Firefighter* last month that much of the "investment" in the regional controls will actually be spent on paying the rent. The regional controls are already being traded between landlords with three being bought for £77 million by one large property group. The typical build cost of around £25 million each will be recouped over only 20 years with a £19 million profit on top for each one. Then the Government will have to either renew the leases or start all over again.

The core services provided by the new FireLink radio system contract will cost at least £350 million. Fire authorities can expect to have to pay much more than this figure in the first ten years of the contract.

➔ For more information visit:
www.controlcare.org.uk/

POON

EME
DIPPED

CLU
MC's
HOUT



RAK

THE DO

Disap

Gen

ON 70:

01.

705

KE

12

2 84228

344

57392

0440

U,
BAS
INFO

YPNO



Clone Town Britain

STEWART WALLIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION

“Something is happening in our high streets, and it isn't the standard ups and downs of UK retail or even Tesco's 'good neighbour' charm offensive. What began as a report by nef (the new economics foundation) called Clone Town Britain has taken on a life of its own. Earlier this year a committee of MPs broadly agreed with our conclusions about monopolistic supermarkets, the London Evening Standard has begun its own Save Our Small Shops campaign, newspaper columnists from across the political spectrum have trumpeted agreement, and now the competition authorities have finally conceded that the grocery retail sector in the UK merits full investigation.

In response to this groundswell, Tesco chief executive Sir Terry Leahy has explained the steps that the retail giant will take to become a 'good neighbour' in the communities they operate in. In spite of promises to support local football teams, the fact remains that if your idea of a 'good neighbour' is someone who clogs the streets with their juggernauts, wakes you up at dawn with their delivery vehicles, puts your favourite small shops out of business, denies you real choice and turns your town into a clone town, then Tesco fits the bill. The danger of having a retail giant as a neighbour is not just that their bland identikit fascia makes them dull – it's what goes on behind the fascia that matters.

'Clone town' describes a place where the individuality of high street shops has been replaced by a monochrome strip of global and national chains. Somewhere that could easily be mistaken for dozens of bland town centres across the country. Our report, Clone Town Britain, showed how retail spaces once filled with a thriving mix of independent butchers, newsagents, tobacconists, pubs, bookshops, greengrocers and family owned general stores are fast being filled with faceless supermarket retailers, fast-food chains, mobile phone shops and global fashion outlets.

And the argument that big retail is good because it provides consumers with choice is ironic, because in the end it leaves us with no choice at all. Look across the Atlantic to Wal-Mart. About 40 years ago it was a small-town American general store; now it has 100 million customers per week and another branch opening somewhere in

the world every three days. Having taken over Asda in 1999, it is firmly rooted in the UK. In the US its combination of out-of-town sites and stack-'em-high, sell-'em-cheap retailing is the equivalent of carpet-bombing for local economies. According to a US study, in the ten years after Wal-Mart moved into Iowa 7,326 businesses went to the wall. In Britain, the expansion of our biggest supermarkets is killing off small general stores at the rate of one per day and specialist shops such as butchers, bakers and fishmongers at 50 per week.

And, for every local store closure there is a knock on impact for other local businesses. Local shops will tend to source services locally; the people who clean their windows, verify their accounts and represent them legally will all tend to be based in the local area. Every time a local shop closes, other local businesses lose trade. But that's not all. For example, if local businesses go to the wall, there is no pool from which to draw retained firefighters at a time when the fire service is currently short

of an estimated 3,000.

The loss of diversity on our high streets also threatens our well-being, according to US research. It found that counties dominated by small businesses had higher average incomes, less income inequality, lower crime rates, higher levels of educational attainment and supported a more vibrant community life in terms of membership in community organisations and voter turn out.

Britain doesn't have to become a nation of clone towns dominated by a handful of retail giants. Just as regulatory changes have allowed it, the right changes can begin to turn back the tide. By promoting local shops we can increase the vitality and stability of local economies. There is much that local communities can do to fight back, but to level the playing field we also need regulatory changes that would make the fight fair. ”

To find out what you can do visit nef's 'hometown' campaign at www.clonetownbritain.org



Is your idea of a good neighbour one that puts your favourite local shop out of business?



MODERN TIMES

Since 2003 fire authorities have been experimenting more with shifts and duty systems. The worst examples have sparked significant opposition

The fire service has always had different shift and duty systems, some negotiated at local level. But since 2003 there has been fresh impetus and greater scope for those who wanted to experiment with shifts and to cut night time fire cover. No matter where you work, one of the biggest causes of anxiety is when employers try to change either shift and duty systems or working hours. The current work/life balance – particularly regarding the family and caring responsibilities – can be badly hit.

It can add worry, anxiety, push up stress levels and result in a rapid drop in morale. For the worst gung-ho managers in the fire service, the very last thoughts have been about how the workforce viewed any proposals.

All that was needed was change

Spurred on by what was then the ODPM and the Audit Commission, fire authorities – some reluctant, some aggressively keen – were pressed into ticking the box marked “shift changes”. Major issues such as “would it work” were set aside. All that was needed was change, whether good or bad.

But some of the worst examples have sparked significant opposition, with either strike action or the threat of it in response. Stability has been replaced with instability.

The West Midlands authority was among the first to try to force change down the throat of its workforce and was held up as a good example by the Audit Commission in its national report into fire service modernisation. It all came spectacularly off the rails with a complex shift system that never worked.

It was so bad that stations had to close and fire calls were held in queues as no pumps were available. Hastily put together scratch crews did not even know each others’ names and they got lost because they were unfamiliar with their new localities.

Morale collapsed then crews got angry, decided to fight back and staged three days of strike action. End of experiment in spectacular and very public failure.

It should have been a salutary lesson that

personnel will react to ill-thought-out changes which throw lives into turmoil. It may have given a few brigades food for thought. But not all of them and the great, new ‘modern’ ideas keep popping up.

One of the most extreme examples comes from Merseyside. The authority wants to return to a shift system that was last used in the 1940s.

Boer War pay rates

It wants firefighters living on five fire stations that it classifies as “low level of risk and activity” (LLAR) and it wants a 96-hour shift – four days at the station. The proposal has gone to the technical advisory panel.

Les Skarratts, Merseyside Brigade Secretary, said: “We got rid of this type of nonsense nearly 70 years ago. To claim that it is family friendly and a good work/life balance to live on the workplace for 96 hours defies belief.

“This is a Second World War shift system with Boer War pay rates. 48 out of the 96 hours would be at a pay rate that is a fifth of the NJC pay rate for the job.”

In Nottinghamshire, chief fire officer Paul Woods tried to go back to Victorian times. His

original proposal was a three by eight hour shift system that would have meant working seven out of eight days.

“There was uproar,” said Regional secretary Dave Limer. “It would have meant very little time with the family or time off at weekends. The chief wanted to impose it by 90-day notices of termination of contract, effectively sacking everyone and taking them back on new contracts.

“Anyone failing to report for duty on the 91st day would have been deemed to have dismissed themselves. It was only the actions of the fire authority that stopped the notices going out.”

There is now a negotiated two-shift system based on three 12-hour days; three days off; then three 12-hour nights; then three days off. The start and finish times are 7am and 7pm with no detriment to leave.

“There is still some disquiet” says Dave Limer. “But this is a negotiated deal and people recognise this is not nearly as bad as the one the chief wanted to impose and which would have led to strike action.”

Hugely unpopular

Similar proposals have been put forward by management in London where a consultative ballot rejected 12-hour shifts. They were also seen as an attack on the watch structure, night cover and the five-days-on-three-days-off pattern in London.

Regional secretary Joe McVeigh said: “It’s hugely unpopular and 98.5% voted against it. In London, members often live a considerable distance from their place of work.

“With a 12-hour shift they’d find themselves leaving for work in the very early hours of the morning and returning home late at night. It would severely restrict time spent with the family, so there is no way this meets requirements to be family friendly.”

“Furthermore any attempt to try and impose change without proper negotiation and/or agreement will lead us into the industrial action arena”

“My members are clear they do not want any other shift system or different start or finish times”

WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS OPPOSE SHIFT CHANGES



One of the worst management tactics is saying shifts have to change to suit women or to be family friendly. In fact women in the fire service are strong supporters of the current shift patterns.

The latest finding was that 96.9% of women who work 2-2-4, for example, support it. Women have even said they would resign if their shift pattern were to change as it would hit their childcare arrangements.

Next month’s *Firefighter* will look in detail at the views of female firefighters on this issue. Just don’t believe local managers who say they’re changing shifts to suit the women, it’s not true.

Kerry Baigent
Secretary, National Women’s Committee



U N I O N L E A R N I N G F U N D

FBU secures additional £1m for Union Learning Fund as it encourages more members to boost their careers



The FBU has secured further funding of over £1 million from the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and £90,000 from the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF), enabling more FBU members to enhance their career and lifelong learning prospects in the UK fire and rescue service.

The additional funds allow the Union to build on the success of the lifelong learning projects it has been running for firefighters and emergency fire control staff over the last two years. The funds will extend the life of the current project to April 2008.

Already, FBU ULF projects have led to more than 2,000 staff taking part in lifelong learning over the last three years. A key aim now will be to increase the number of members achieving either a level 1 or level 2 national test pass in numeracy and/or literacy.

"Whether it's been skills for life, languages or the highly popular ICT courses, FBU members have been keen to get onboard with the learning agenda. The object now is to get sustainability built in to the union structure and progress the support of employers and management in creating a lifelong learning



culture," says Trevor Shanahan, national FBU ULF project manager.

"Over the next two years the union will be involved in expanding the current lifelong learning agenda and increasing access to learning opportunities for more members."

"In particular, we want more members to achieve either a level 1 or level 2 national test pass in numeracy and/or literacy. Government statistics reveal that the number of adults with a learning difficulty is still in the millions and

as part of the trade union movement we want to see all workers given access to learning that will improve their work and social lives."

2,000 courses for FBU members

The FBU's learning centres in Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, Tyne and Wear FRS and Cleveland FRS have delivered over 2,000 courses to our members and continue to provide a variety of courses to all fire and rescue employees, family and friends.

With the added bonus of being accredited, the project delivers the national tests in numeracy and literacy, and has already enabled a number of applicants to the UK fire and rescue service to meet the entry standards by providing learning support in skills for life.

The major new development in the current ULF project was the involvement of firefighters working the retained duty system, who recently took part in a pilot e-learning project using the Scottish Fire Services Virtual College site which they endorsed following completion of the pilot.

This provided skills-for-life (Sfl) courses in numeracy and literacy for retained firefighters

...easy as 123



who may look to transfer across to full-time and also delivered skills-for-life to help applicants to the UK fire and rescue service meet entrance requirements.

The ULF project also has the FBU's own skills for life (Sfl) tutor working from our learning centres who, as well as providing Sfl tuition, is working to contextualise course content for fire and rescue service use.

The FBU has around 200 Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) already trained through the TUC and they are now gaining the confidence to help members with information and advice in going back to learning.

Says Trevor: "It is particularly pleasing to see many members, who have had no partici-

pation as a union official taking up the role of the ULR.

"The FBU will be ensuring that, on behalf of our members, both the ULF project and the new TUC Academy 'Union Learn' deliver quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for our members.

"All workers deserve the opportunity to improve themselves at work and at home. The project, working with employers, enables them to do so by providing learning opportunities through the workplace."

→ For information on what's going on in the regions and how you can become a union learning rep visit the FBU learn website at <http://ulf.fbu.org.uk>, which has just been launched.

→ Your regional ULF coordinators

- Region 1 **Jack Munro** ULFo1@fbu.org.uk
- Region 2 **Lynda Rowan – O'Neill** ULFo2@fbu.org.uk
- Region 3 **Adrian Slassor** adrian.slassor@fbu.org.uk
- Region 4 **Mike Kirkby** ULFo4@fbu.org.uk
- Region 5 **Howard Western** ULFo5@fbu.org.uk
- Region 6 **Andy Brickles** ULFo6@fbu.org.uk
- Region 7 **Maxine Laughter** ULFo7@fbu.org.uk
- Region 8 **Mike Davies** ULFo8@fbu.org.uk
- Region 9 **Steve Brinkley** ULFo9@fbu.org.uk
- Region 10 **Ian Smith** ULF10@fbu.org.uk
- Region 11 **Bob Fitzgerald** ULF11@fbu.org.uk
- Region 12 **Harry William** ULF12@fbu.org.uk
- Region 13 **Bill Hendy** ULF13@fbu.org.uk



A UNION ACADEMY



On 2 May the 'Union Learn' project was launched by Chancellor Gordon Brown and former Education Secretary Ruth Kelly with representatives from a range of trade unions, including the FBU, present. The project aims to create a 'Union Academy' which brings all aspects of union education under one roof. It will encompass trade union education and trade union learning services with new structures being put into place to support education and learning throughout the union movement.



Chris Wood in Sokolow, Poland with colleagues from Staffordshire Fire Service, officers Alf Wilson and John O'Leary and rest of team

Bosnia, Russia and as far as Malawi in South East Africa.

"We were contacted by SESHAA to see if the Fire Brigades Union would be interested in getting involved," says Chris. "It fitted hand in glove with our work as a trade union helping people in struggle. We agreed".

"Everyone who participates gives up their annual leave to do so. And we raise the funds ourselves whether through car washes or from other unions."

Staffordshire FBU regional committee also makes regular donations to the organisation from the political fund.

"A lot of our work is about raising the profile of the fire service in countries that have suffered war or a long-term lack of resources.

"In Malawi, the fire service was treated shabbily. We've been three times since 2000, bringing fire fighting equipment – including brand new RTC rescue vehicles and aerial appliances donated by the Korean government – and personal protective clothing, and providing training and support."

"In Poland, local firefighters were very impressed with the professionalism of the Staffordshire firefighters and were keen that we pass on our skills too so they could provide a better service to their community."

Part of the team

Chris and colleagues have also contributed to changing attitudes about the fire service in other ways. In Malawi, where they were national TV news, they helped recruit female firefighters to the local fire service, while two female fire service staff – "non-uniformed, we hope some firefighters or control staff next time" – were part of the team that went to Poland this May. "It is important to show that the fire service doesn't have to be male-dominated," says Chris.

They have also promoted unionisation. "In Malawi, when local firefighters heard what the FBU was doing for its members in terms of improving pay and conditions and securing additional resources for the fire service, we nearly had a revolt on our hands. Now they are in the process of establishing their own union."

Among the first projects Chris was involved with were getting medical and fire service equipment to Albania and Bosnia. "Plans went pear-shaped because of the eruption of civil war. But we were determined to make it work and we managed despite the odds, thanks in part to external help."

This came in the shape of firefighters at a

Widening horizons

Staffs FBU members and officials are lending a hand to firefighters and local communities in eastern Europe and further afield

Chris Wood, a Staffordshire firefighter and FBU official, is fresh back from Sokolow Malapolski in Poland. A rural area a few hundred miles from the Ukrainian border in the south east of the country, it's an unlikely place to visit on your annual leave.

But Chris wasn't in Sokolow on his holidays. Together with ten colleagues from the brigade, he had come to help the local community, bringing equipment to build up their dilapidated local fire and social services.

The trip was the culmination of months of detailed planning by Staffordshire firefighters and FBU officials, who, following a "reccé" last autumn, set off this April on a journey across

the Continent, past the old Iron Curtain to the eastern limits of the new European Union. The team, led by Alf Wilson, an area commander in Staffordshire, was laden with fire kit – road traffic collision extrication equipment, trauma care and breathing apparatus – and computers, donated by FBU solicitors Thompsons, to equip a special school, nursery and a fire station.

This wasn't the first time Staffs firefighters have given up their time to help others less fortunate than themselves in another part of the world. As part of the Staffordshire Emergency Services Humanitarian Aid Association (SESHAA), a registered charity made up of individual workers and trade unionists including from the police and health service, they have been to Albania,

fire station in Bari, Southern Italy, who agreed to store aid while a mission had to be temporarily suspended at short notice. And help in delivering aid has also been forthcoming from the United Nations. But the process is reciprocal. "We are becoming recognised by the UN, which is calling more and more on our assistance in developing fire services and communities in deprived areas," says Chris.

'We are very direct'

The FBU's international solidarity work takes many forms, and they are all as valid and valuable as the other, says Chris. "In Staffs, we are very direct. We take material things direct to the area where they are needed."

"And it's not a question of here today gone tomorrow," he adds.

"We do check on things, see how people are doing and follow up with further action where appropriate. We've already been three times but we will definitely revisit Malawi to see what progress they have made.

"In Sokolov, we've now established twinning links between schools in the area and in Staffordshire.

"We hope now to set up a meeting between the Mayor of Sokolov, who has been working hard to build his local fire service, as well as the local chief fire officer, with members of the European parliament to see if European financing can be found to turn the area's voluntary fire service into a properly-funded

'The more projects we do the more people get involved. We've got over 50 people in the organisation now'

professional service."

Six years after first getting involved in SESHAA, Chris is more enthusiastic and ambitious than ever, talking among other things, of the possibility of a mission to Iraq.

"The more projects we do the more people get involved. We've got over 50 people in the organisation now."

"We go to places you wouldn't normally visit. It allows you to see the world through different eyes. It widens your horizons. And it feels good that you have contributed to improving people's lives."

→ If you are an FBU member and wish to receive regular email updates on the Union's international work or wish to get more involved in our international campaigns email: international@fbu.org.uk

Where they have been



POLAND

Following a fact finding trip to Sokolow, Poland in September 2005, finding a fire station with 2 appliances 30 to 40 years old and one 15-year old Rescue Tender. Returned April 2006, with a convoy of three vehicles with equipment for the voluntary Fire Service – RTC extrication, trauma care and Breathing Apparatus – special school and local nursery.



BOSNIA

Left for Bosnia in October 1997 to deliver full fire kit and to assess the area for firefighting capabilities. Return mission to Gracanica in April 1999 delivering a fully kitted fire appliance. Clothes, toys and hygiene products were delivered to an orphanage in Sarajavo, Gracanica where a playground was built for the children and clothes and medical aid was also delivered to five refugee camps in the area.



ALBANIA

A mission was planned to transport £20,000 of medical aid and equipment to Librahzd in Albania in March 1997. The team were unable to enter Albania safely due to the war, the aid was stored with the Italian Fire Service in Bari, Southern Italy until negotiation was made to try to restore the mission. In August 1997 all of the equipment was taken to Librahzd by SESHAA contacts via the UN in Rome.



MALAWI

Three missions starting from 2001 providing training and support to the fire service in city of Blantyre, where station only had one working Fire Appliance. Equipment shipped included a number of firefighting appliances, two of which were new RTC Rescue Vehicles and an aerial appliance from the Korean Government. The Team also delivered food aid to the villages of the Plateau, high outside Blantyre near Lake Malawi.



WHAT DOES THE WALES FIRE MINISTER DO?



Edwina Hart works in partnership with the FBU and other stakeholders to achieve greater fire safety. It's an approach that pays dividends



Edwina Hart is Wales' "Minister for Fire". The role is part of her portfolio as Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration in the Welsh Assembly, which includes youth justice, community safety and drives to tackle poverty alongside relations with the police and the fire service.

The Welsh Assembly in Cardiff is showing it can teach Westminster a thing or two when it comes to innovative practice to boost safety and reduce fire risks.

"We asked for fire to be devolved after the strike," Ms Hart explains. "The fire authorities were quite keen too and it means we can focus on things that we think are most important for our communities. Fire safety is a real focus for us here in Wales."

As a former president of the Wales TUC, Edwina Hart's role as a minister is informed by a deep understanding of trade unionism. She was also the first ever woman president of BIFU (the Banking, Insurance and Finance

Union), now Amicus Unifi. So it comes as no surprise that she welcomes FBU involvement and that of other key stakeholders in helping shape strategies to reduce the risk of fire. She believes this will be best achieved by working in partnership and has no desire to micromanage the service. A new integrated approach to reducing risk, harnessing education and prevention has now been agreed.

The approach is spelt out in Wales A Safer Country, published in March, and shows marked differences in the approach to reducing the risk of fire compared to that of the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime) in England, where integrated risk management planning (IRMP) underpins how fire cover is set at local brigade level.

In Wales, risk reduction planning has been chosen as the best approach, with an increased emphasis on education and prevention. Planning guidance aims to get response times to 80 per cent of domestic fires to within ten minutes. Minimising risk to life is para-

mount. So when Edwina Hart says "Fire safety has been a real focus for us in Wales" it cannot be brushed off as political spin. It has real substance.

"It's a very holistic approach," Ms Hart explains, with community safety at the core of an approach that fits into the department's social justice agenda. To bankroll increased emphasis on reducing fires, the Welsh Assembly's Safer Communities Fund for Fire and Rescue has increased from £5m last year to £14m in 2006-7 and £25m in £2007-8.

Leading the way

Wales is leading the way in piloting a programme to install sprinklers in schools, again stealing a march on England. Figures for fires in schools show that there were 63 in 2004 – with 70 per cent started deliberately.

Ms Hart chose Penyrheol Comprehensive, a Swansea school ravaged by fire in March, to launch the new fire reduction guidance, taking time to praise firefighters who stopped the blaze



Edwina Hart at
Roath fire station in
Central Cardiff

spreading to nearby buildings. For Ms Hart, the attack was pretty close to home – the school is in her constituency. “It’s in everyone’s interest that Wales becomes a safer place to work, visit, travel and live and reducing the risk of fire is essential to achieving this,” she said.

“Fire and rescue authorities manage a complex environment – they face increasing demands on their resources and need to deliver both intervention and prevention services. The development of a risk reduction plan within each authority allows for consistent, systematic and repeatable approaches to be adopted across Wales.

“The service standards being developed in Wales are based on life safety and an emphasis on preventing fires from occurring in the first place. Fire and rescue authorities will be working with many agencies and authorities to reduce risk in imaginative and innovative ways.”

She is keen to see “citizens, communities and businesses” get involved – engaging with

the fire and rescue authorities to develop risk reduction plans. “Communities will gain a deeper understanding of the work of the service through this, cementing the high degree of confidence the public already places in it.”

Ms Hart is spending a lot of time on police reorganisation – policing, unlike fire, is not devolved. She says she enjoys the fire safety part of her portfolio and believes strongly that it is rightly placed in the social justice agenda.

Her commonsense instincts as a good trade unionist seem very much intact. She told Firefighter: “We could actually devolve pay bargaining if we wanted to – but we believe it should stay at a national level across the UK. Why should a firefighter in East Anglia get paid differently from a firefighter in Cardiff or Pembrokeshire? National bargaining is much more satisfactory.”

There are many in the trade union movement who agree.

Working For You

TREVOR FRENCH

Devon Brigade Secretary

Building strength locally

Trevor French is FBU Brigade secretary in Devon. Trevor argues a strong union is the best way to defend members’ interests and fight against morale-sapping apathy. And he and his brigade committee colleagues are proof positive that challenging unreasonable management demands can pay off.

When local bosses tried to do away with beds in full-time stations, FBU Devon took expert advice, commissioning an independent report from an osteopath to support the case for proper rest facilities.

“We managed to keep the beds at existing stations and futons will be trialled at a new station in Plymouth. It’s a bit of a

‘When it comes to modernisation, people are more willing to say ‘No’ if what is being asked is not reasonable’

compromise, but better than the reclining chairs management wanted to bring in to save money,” says Trevor. The union has also secured an extra day’s leave for Devon firefighters working on shift and day crewed stations.

Trevor had to take management to an employment tribunal to assert his right to time off for union duties – and other FBU members have been willing to take the tribunal route to assert their rights.

“I think that because of the [national pay] dispute, members down here are a lot more clued up and as union reps we are more in touch.

“So when it comes to modernisation, people are more willing to say ‘No’ if what is being asked is not reasonable.

“The biggest thing at the moment is to keep management within the Grey Book,” he adds. “That’s what they signed up to. It’s not the best thing in the world but if they try and go beyond it you’ve just got to refuse and take the consequences as they’re dealt. If management aren’t going to stick to the Grey book, they’ll find they can only push the membership so far.”

“We know what we’re entitled to and we know when we can push the boat out and when we can’t. It also helps that the FBU officials do not take life too seriously, enjoy a laugh and a joke plus the odd Corona.”

It seems a revitalised union, in touch with members’ needs, is getting results – and ready to resist unreasonable demands.

Living and breathing

Genetic factors and our modern lifestyle are making the condition a growing concern

ASTHMA

In the UK 5.2 million people have asthma, a condition that affects the airways – the small tubes in the lungs that carry air in and out. When a person with asthma comes into contact with something that irritates their airways (an asthma trigger), the muscles around the walls of the airways tighten so that the airways become narrower and the lining of the airways becomes inflamed and start to swell. As this occurs it becomes difficult to breathe and brings on asthma symptoms.

Asthma affects one in five households in the UK today. It is a growing concern for many people, especially as we have one of the highest asthma rates in the world. The reasons for this are still unclear but we do know that it is a combination of genetic factors and many aspects of our modern lifestyle.

If a parent has asthma, the chance of their child developing asthma is double that of children whose parents don't have asthma. Currently over a million children have asthma – about three children in every class. The way we live today has an influence on the development of asthma – smoking during pregnancy, second-hand smoke, diet,

USUAL SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA

- ◆ coughing
- ◆ wheezing
- ◆ shortness of breath
- ◆ tightness in the chest

the homes we live in as well as pollution – all play their part in the impact it has on our families.

Don't be fooled into thinking it is just a childhood condition – adults can also develop late-onset asthma. 70% of people with late-onset asthma are more likely to have their symptoms triggered by catching a cold or irritants such as cigarette smoke, household chemical sprays and fragrances, rather than allergic reactions to pollen and house dust mites.

Occupational asthma

Some substances that people come across at work can actually cause asthma. The Health & Safety Executive estimates that between 1,500 and 3,000 people in Great Britain develop occupational asthma every year. The condition can take weeks, months or even years to develop, depending on the person and the substance. Occupational asthma is the only type of asthma that, if identified quickly enough, can be cured.

A wide variety of substances can set off asthma symptoms and affect people in a diverse range of jobs, including firefighting, particularly due to exposure to chemicals and smoke. Asthma UK has produced Asthma at Work – Your Charter that includes recommendations to reduce the impact of asthma in the workplace and provides information on asthma triggers and symptoms, instructions on what to do if someone is having an attack and guidelines for employers on making the work environment an asthma-friendly zone.

Where to go for help

Four in five adults with asthma in the UK do not have their asthma under control. That means more than 3 million people are living with symptoms that affect their lives unnecessarily. But if their asthma is well controlled they should not have to miss out on the things that others take for granted, like sleeping well at night and doing exercise.

People should realise asthma symptoms are not inevitable and that it is important to see their doctor, nurse or pharmacist for an asthma review and a written personal asthma action plan.

Supporting Asthma UK

Asthma UK's volunteers make a real difference to the lives of people with asthma. Our fundraisers have completed challenges like climbing Kilimanjaro and trekking Peru and every year we have hundreds of people running marathons across the world. Fundraising support means that we can fund vital research investigating the causes of asthma and help to prevent it developing in the first place. It will also mean that we can provide vital services, such as our Kick Asthma holidays for children with asthma – week-long adventure holidays teaching children and young people more about how to control their asthma and giving them a great confidence boost as well as parents the chance to relax for a week.

➔ For the latest independent advice and news on asthma visit www.asthma.org.uk

Asthma UK Adviceline

Ask an asthma nurse specialist:
08457 01 02 03 or asthma.org.uk/adviceline.

Asthma UK publications

Specialist information on every aspect of asthma:
020 7786 5000, info@asthma.org.uk



Dust mites found in household furnishings can trigger asthma

ANDREW SYRED/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

Complaints about airlines and airports

Q What should I do if I have a complaint about an airline or airport?

A If your flight is cancelled or delayed or your baggage lost or stolen, you must tell the airline as soon as possible. If it does not help with your complaint there and then, you will need to put your complaint in writing with details of your losses, stating what you would like the airline to do to remedy the situation. If you are not satisfied then you may be able to refer the complaint to the Air Transport Users Council. The UK's consumer watchdog for air travellers, it tries to assist in a dispute by acting independently and seeing if it feels the airline is a fault. It has no powers to compel an airline to accept its views.

Airlines have a set compensation scheme for certain losses under the Montreal Convention. You may be able to claim through this scheme if you suffered any losses. Any losses not covered by the scheme may be recoverable through the courts.

Air Transport Users Council
020 7240 6061 (Mon to Thurs
9.30am to 2.30pm)
www.auc.org.uk

Money from out of the blue

Q A large sum of money I know nothing about has been put into my bank account, should I tell the bank or just keep it?

A If money was put into your account by mistake the bank is usually entitled to recover it within a reasonable time. It is best to notify the bank immediately so the issue can be resolved. If you did not realise

SATOSHI KAMENASHI



Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

that the mistake had been made, acted in good faith and used the money thinking it was yours; or if the money had changed your position in such a way that it would be unfair to ask for it to be repaid – for example, you used the money to improve your lifestyle – then you could try and argue to keep the money.

You will have to repay the money if you knew it was a mistake or you have not spent all of the money and can repay

part of it.

If you feel the bank will be acting unfairly if it tries to recover the money you should first complain to the bank itself and go through its internal complaints procedure. If that does not work you can go to the Financial Ombudsman Service for an independent decision on whether the money is repayable and also to the British Bankers Association and Banking Code Standards Board.

If the bank does have the right to recover the money you could try to negotiate small repayments over time without further interest being added. If you do not pay back money you are not entitled to, you could face prosecution for theft.

Financial Ombudsman Service
0845 080 1800
www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

British Bankers Association
www.bba.org.uk
Banking Code Standards Board
0845 230 9694
www.bankingcode.org.uk

When a gift is faulty

Q What are my consumer rights for gifts that are faulty?

A If you buy goods (or services) for yourself from a trader you have statutory consumer rights for the purchase under the Sale of Goods Act 1979 (as amended).

But if you buy a gift for someone else and this is found to be faulty when they open it, often only the purchaser will have rights to get some redress. The person receiving the gift (known as a third party) may be able to enforce a term of the contract under the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.

The contract would have to have been made so that it provided for the third party to have the right to enforce it. For example, if it was stated at the time of purchase the item was a present for someone else, that person's name may appear on an order/invoice or be delivered to them directly or have their details written on the back of the receipt.

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

'I'm very competitive and always love winning'

Managing a tennis team is 'all about picking the team, encouraging players, bringing out the best in people and making sure everything's there for them,' says Karen Adams

Managing one highly rated tennis team sounds pretty impressive – but FBU activist Karen Adams is now non-playing manager of two. First there is Dorset County, where Karen started playing for the junior team when she was 12. She moved up to the senior side five years later and became team captain in the mid-nineties at 28.

She still loves to play, but since 2000 has been non-playing captain of the county team. "There are so many good players coming through and I was getting older," she says. "I thoroughly enjoy running the county team, but quite fancy playing for the veterans in future."

As a county player, she had an impressive record, playing in both winter and summer competitions for a good few years against other county teams. These two inter-county competitions attract the best players in the country and places in the top division are highly prized.

Two years ago the team made it to the top division in the winter tournament for the first time in Dorset County tennis history. "It was



KAREN ADAMS

Dorset firefighter Karen Adams splits her working time in half – riding fire engines as a floating sub officer and representing FBU members as brigade secretary for Dorset. She also makes sure she finds plenty of time for tennis when not on duty.

PICTURES: DAVID MANSELL

a fabulous achievement to play in the first division consisting of the top four counties in the country,” says Karen. “We never thought we’d make it, and unfortunately we didn’t stay there very long. But when you’re up against clubs like Middlesex and Surrey it’s a really tough challenge to stay up.” This year, her ambition is to get the team up into the second division in the summer competition that consists of five days of doubles on grass and return to division one in the winter.

But there is yet more tennis in Karen’s life. For the past five years, she has managed the West Hants Tennis Club, one of the country’s largest and oldest. It is owned by the Lawn Tennis Association and steeped in history.

Cream of the county

Karen’s two teams not only share the same manager, but there is also a crossover of skilled women players – the cream of the county also turns out for West Hants. The club has got to the finals of the national club league competition for the past five years – where the top eight teams in the country battle it out for victory after winning through in the regions. And for the last three years West Hants has come in third.

Karen has managed the county team since 1996 and continued to play for four years before becoming non-playing captain. “My job is to pick the team and coach and encourage them as much as I can. We are a really great team and have excellent team spirit. There are a couple of quality women players who’ve been playing for the

team for quite a few years – they both studied at American universities on tennis scholarships. It’s very exciting to see the younger players coming through, though a shame that many talented young women tend to give up playing when they get to 15 or 16. They should be encouraged. There are a lot of distractions, but it can be very rewarding.

“As a junior, Easter and summer holidays

were always tournament, tournament, tournament. Once you move up to senior level there’s not much around except county and club competitions which require a lot of commitment and dedication.”

Though tennis plays an important part in her life, Karen is an all round sports enthusiast – and has a season ticket for her local football club AFC Bournemouth. She gets pleasure from watching as well as playing sport and is quick to acknowledge that her non-playing role in the two teams brings its own satisfactions. “There’s a lot of stuff to organise in the run-up to matches and on the day – and it’s my job to make sure it all goes smoothly and we don’t come away thinking we haven’t done as well as we could have done.

“I’m very competitive and always loved winning when I was playing regularly. You don’t stop being competitive

just because you’re sitting on the bench. One year we narrowly missed out on promotion to a higher league and I was absolutely mortified for weeks afterwards. You get the adrenalin and the nerves when you are playing. When you’re watching you still get the nerves and live every point.”

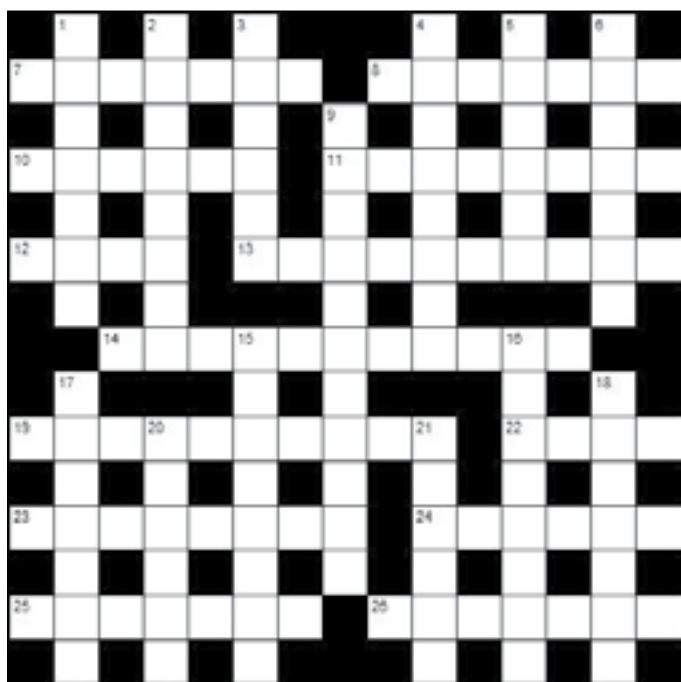
Karen reckons that her natural competitiveness helps her carry out her union role: “When you are negotiating on behalf of members it’s important to get the best deal you can.” Game, set and match may not always be achievable – but Karen sounds like the sort of brigade secretary who will certainly give it her best shot.

➔ Further info: www.lta.org.uk

Karen still loves to play, but since 2000 has been non-playing captain of the county team



Quick Crossword

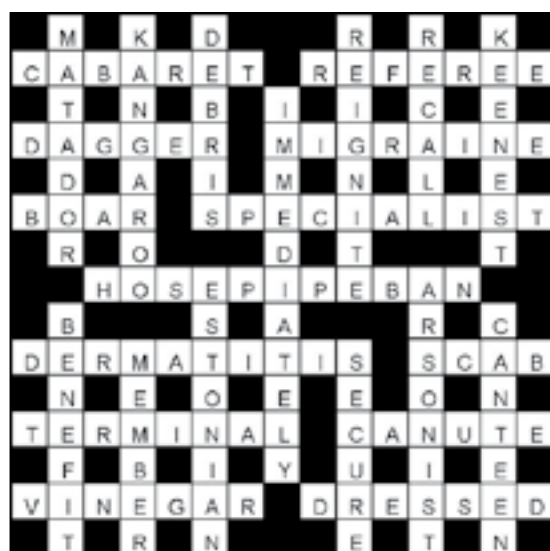


ACROSS

- 7 One who checks the books (7)
 8 Crop-destroying insects (7)
 10 Major workplace health problem (6)
 11 Flat tyre (8)
 12 Exercise regime, or Hindu philosophical system (4)
 13 Play-acting; laying claim (10)
 14 Breathing equipment (11)
 19 Evidence of passer-by (10)
 22 Benefit derived from job (4)
 23 Sequence of words, or years! (8)
 24 Earlies, lates, or graveyards (6)
 25 Maybe (7)
 26 Shrank back (7)

DOWN

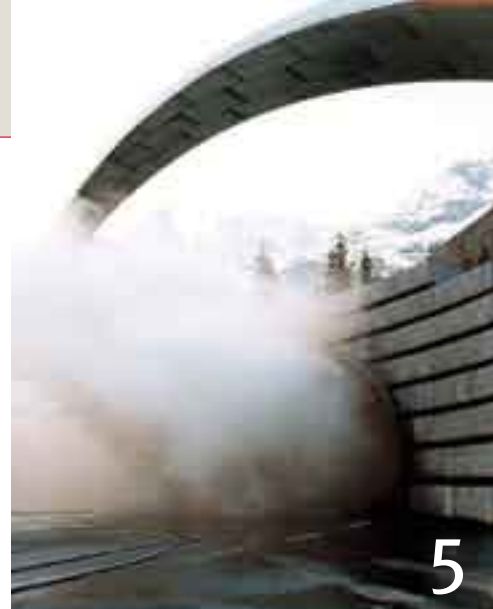
- 1 Sale (7)
 2 Able to read and write (8)
 3 Tittle-tattle (6)
 4 Least aged (8)
 5 Reduced (by fire) to a shell (6)
 6 Unblinking (7)
 9 They can be deceptive (11)
 15 Fine words won't butter them (8)
 16 Cold-blooded, egg-laying creatures (8)
 17 Clothed; hidden; insured (7)
 18 Fellow trade unionist (7)
 20 Bad-tempered (6)
 21 Fellow trade unionist – but not a fellow! (6)



Solution
to May
crossword

Answers to
May quiz:
 1. Harry Potter
and the Goblet
of Fire
 2. The Last Night
London Burned
 3. Test of Fire
 4. Floyd on Fire
 5. Forged in Fire
 6. Fireman Sam

Winner of the
minicam in our April
quiz was James
Harper of Belfast



STEFANO SARTI/AP/EMPHICS

Prize Quiz

Win an illustrated book

Enter our quiz and *Firefighters in art and media* could be yours. This month: historic fires. Just name the city or location of the fire by solving the five clues.

1 The Emperor Nero reigned over this city in 64AD where a fire burned for eight days.

2 This 'great' fire started in a baker's shop in 1666.

3 Over 30,000 houses were destroyed by this fire which started in September 1812 when Napoleon and

his army entered the city of the Tsars and its inhabitants fled.

4 On April 18 100 years ago an earthquake struck this US city and was the cause of subsequent fires that reduced it to rubble.

5 In 1999 a truck caught fire in this tunnel between France and Italy killing 41 people. Temperatures at the centre of the fire reached 1,800 degrees celsius.

HOW TO ENTER

Send your answers to the prize quiz by 30 June on a postcard to: Prize Competition (June 2006) FBU Head Office, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

■ *Firefighters in art and media* (John A Walker; pub. Francis Boutle; ISBN 1903427231) is available to FBU members with a discount of 20% off the rrp (£27.50): £22 plus p & p. To order a copy contact Clive Boutle: clive@francisboutle.co.uk



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Sick note



Congratulations to Paul Blanchard-Flett of Merseyside fire service, now happily driving a new Ford Focus thanks to a lucky win in a prize draw. Paul's name was picked at random from the 1,088 people entered in the fire authority's draw because of their unblemished sickness absence record.

Station Cat must point out that the inclusion of Mr Blanchard-Flett's name in the draw was entirely proper. **It was simply luck that the manager who deals with sickness absence (Mr Blanchard-Flett) won the car** and we should all be happy for him.

Fat cats



More tales of high-cost external consultants flow to me from NO DPM following last month's revelations about salary costs for the Local Government and Fire Group section. Staffing costs for the 550 working in the Local Government and Fire Group hit £23,762,000 plus in the last calendar year.

But the money spent on external consultants by NO DPM is so staggering that it is nearly a national disgrace. Since NO DPM was created in 2002 it has spent £212,446,560 on consultants.

Official figures for 2004/05 show NO DPM spent over £80 million on external consultants. The costs of consultants in the last full year were nearly FOUR times the annual salaries of those 550 civil servants.

The **money spent on consultants in those THREE years would just about cover NO DPM salary costs for the 550 civil servants for TEN years.** Next time you are asked where that extra public spending the Government boasts about is going, you can point to the fat cats of the new consultocracy.

Chop, chop



Sometimes photos and headlines are placed that little too close together. Just ask Hertfordshire's Chief Fire Officer Roy Wilsher. Roy's photo appears on the front page of the *Borehamwood and Elstree Times* (see above) in connection with his plans to cut firefighters and close two fire stations in Hertfordshire.



Axe-wielding 'madman' on the rampage

Roy Wilsher and the inconvenient headline – good thing there's no chance of any misunderstanding

His photo is very close to the headline of another story about **an as yet unidentified madman running around Hertfordshire with an axe.** I assure you the photo and headline shown here are entirely unrelated, merely twists of fate and design.

Fireman Sam is safe



Did Fireman Sam follow correct procedures when called to a house fire? Following a complaint from a viewer, executives of the BBC and broadcasting regulator Ofcom reviewed tapes of the Fireman Sam episode broadcast on CBeebies on 10 February this year.

They watched with bated breath as Fireman Sam arrived at the house. According to Ofcom's official report of 2 May Fireman Sam then "went into the bedroom where the electric blanket was on fire and extinguished the blaze with water."

A viewer questioned whether Fireman Sam had followed the correct procedures. So a phalanx of broadcast execs had to review the programme.

The Ofcom report points out gravely: "When Fireman Sam arrived at the fire, before he entered the building, he asked his colleague Elvis to ensure the electrical power source had been disconnected."

Ofcom concluded Fireman Sam "had followed the correct procedure". Fireman's Sam's brigade – somewhere in Wales – Station Cat is happy to inform you, will take no disciplinary action against him.

Fireman Simon says



Not so lucky in North Wales where chief officer Simon Smith boasts of having a "listening authority". Does this mean only listening to him?

The latest IRMP proposes the axing of two emergency tenders in North Wales, including one sited at Colwyn Bay Fire Station. This prompted an anonymous letter to a local paper criticising the plan.

Such action would normally be viewed as part of a local campaign trying to stave off fire service cuts. But CFO Smith is on a mission to find who wrote the off-message letter.

He investigated all staff at Colwyn Bay, leaving no hose-reel unturned. **Even those on long term sick leave were reportedly called in.** Then all FBU officials in North Wales were ordered to attend a discipline interview.

I wonder if he mistakenly picked up the History of the Salem Witch Trials to assist him in the process, rather than the ACAS Code of Practice.

If he has he will know the Shadow of the Station Cat is upon him. He can't be too careful, can he?

So farewell then NO DPM



When I said NO DPM it was not a call for the department to be shut down and ministers forced off to other departments (or none in the case of John Prescott).

I am now left with no NO DPM. Its passing adds yet again to the legend of the curse of the Station Cat and any mention in this column.

Farewell then, NO DPM and welcome to CLoG, the Department of Communities and Local Government. How long can it last now? Is one mention enough?

→ If you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into then e-mail: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25 year badges



Andy Cooper (left) receives his 25 year badge from Garry Harney, Branch H&S rep Macclesfield.



Keith Hampton (left), Red Watch receives his 25 year badge from Alistair Burns, Branch Chair, Southern Station, Leicestershire.



Tony Whiston (right) receiving his 25 year badge from Macclesfield branch rep Stewart Hammond.



Gregory Pattinson, (right) Wembley Fire Station Blue Watch receives his 25 year badge from Station Officer Mick Dibley.



Steve Ockenden, (right) Wembley Fire Station, Blue Watch, receives his 25 year badge from Branch chair Sean O'Keeffe.



Ian Scott (right) receives his 25 year badge from watch manager Donald Neil at Greenock Fire Station, Strathclyde.



Katrina Ogilvie (left), Tayside Control, receives her 25 year badge from Heather Lawrie, Region 1 Woman's Branch Secretary.



Allan Mann (right), Group Manager Community Safety Dept, Fife, receives his 25 year badge from FBU President Ruth Winters.



Dave Copson (left), Southern Station White Watch, receives his 25 year badge from Alistair Burns, Branch Chair, Southern Station, Leicestershire.

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include **FULL DETAILS** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



John Boothby (left) receives his 25 year badge from Garry Harney, Macclesfield Branch H&S rep.

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
o1rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 N. Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
o2rs@fbu.org

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
o3rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
o4rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
o5rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
6 Bridgford Road, West Bridgford,
Nottingham, NG2 6AB
0115 982 7202
o6gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
o7rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
o8rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
10ra@fbu.org.uk
o9rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Fire Station, Coldharbour Road,
Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT
01474 320473
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR NEXT OF KIN

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues**. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

